

Editorial

DICK DOUWES

The ISIM's five-year formative period is drawing to a close. The institute is nearly functioning at full capacity of academic staff and fellows. Last year an evaluation report was drawn up by Peter Geschiere (Leiden University/University of Amsterdam), Barbara Metcalf (University of California at Davis), and Merle Rickleffs (University of Melbourne) (see www.isim.nl). The reflection upon the ISIM's recent past and ensuing changes were the more crucial because ISIM's first and current Academic Director, Muhammad Khalid Masud, will be retiring in September 2003. His unique expertise that combines a profound and lived knowledge of Islamic law and society with a keen interest in the humanities and social sciences has shaped the ISIM research agenda over the last four years. Much to the benefit of the ISIM he succeeded in attracting the cooperation of leading scholars in the broad field of the study of Muslim societies and cultures. Some of these colleagues pay homage to Khalid Masud in this issue of the ISIM Newsletter (Eickelman, pp. 14–15; Mesick, pp. 16–17, and Moosa 30–1). When I told him of these special features Khalid Masud commented jokingly that it is, indeed, preferable to see one's obituaries when still alive! Among the most modest and unassuming international scholars, Khalid Masud's legacy is already evident and the appreciation of his scholarship and intellectual acuity is not limited to Western academia. Last April he was awarded the Iqbal Award in Pakistan for his book *Iqbal's Reconstruction of Ijtihad*.

With his retirement the ISIM loses not only a great scholar, but also a true Muslim intellectual who shows great concern for social, political, and moral dynamics within Muslim societies and communities, including those in Europe. Much of his work is also aimed at stimulating an open and critical discourse among Muslims and connecting

intellectual debates with developments at the grassroots level. In particular his observation that today too much sacredness is attached to the past (see his interview with Tayob, pp. 18–19) demonstrates this concern. It accentuates his use of the past – not to reconstruct it but to historicize the great Islamic tradition and its openness to change. In this spirit are Khalid Masud's writings on the fourteenth-century scholar al-Shatibi, which are among his most influential scholarly output.

Masud's scholarship being unique, the ISIM was of course obliged to open itself to a different profile for a successor. In its search, the ISIM relied on the joint commitment of the ISIM Chairs. Contrary to the first years, when Khalid Masud and Martin van Bruinessen were the only ISIM Chairs, with the appointments of Annelies Moors in 2001 and Abdulkader Tayob in 2002 the ISIM has gained the critical mass needed to enhance its research capacity.

Asef Bayat, the ISIM Academic Director and ISIM Chair at Leiden University from September 2003 onwards (see p. 5), has followed a somewhat different, if not reverse, trajectory of academic interests to that of Khalid Masud: Bayat started his research on the working classes, later moving to issues concerning faith. Nonetheless, both share the lived experience of dramatic change in their home countries and prolonged exile.

One of the changes that followed from the evaluation of the ISIM was the dissolution of its twin advisory committees: the International Advisory Committee and the Academic Committee. Instead, a new and single Advisory Committee is presently in formation. In particular the input of the Academic Committee has been vital in the success of the ISIM in establishing itself internationally within a short span of time, also because several of its members have been actively engaged in ISIM activities and are among the contributors to the ISIM Newsletter, this issue being no exception.

After eleven issues published in tabloid style, the ISIM Newsletter – as well as the ISIM Website – has been revamped. Some of the functions of the Newsletter have been transferred to the website, such as the international agenda of conferences and workshops, as the Internet offers a more up to date and interactive instrument. The website has more than this to offer (see p. 11). The aim is to create a greater interaction between the Newsletter and the website. Back issues of the ISIM Newsletter are available on the site (www.isim.nl) and they will also be published on cd-rom. As in the past, we invite your comments and suggestions.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

■ *When the ISIM Newsletter 11 opens its first page with a colossal howler, there must be something deeply wrong with the author, the editorial office, or both. Stefano Allievi, in the bold-faced introduction to his leading article on 'Converts and the Making of European Islam', which is also the first paragraph of the Newsletter, calls attention to three people: Jonny Walker, 'labelled "Jonny the Taliban"'; José Padilla, 'loaded with explosives'; and John Allen Williams, 'the serial killer'. So far so good. The reader's attention is awakened. And then comes the final sentence of that little paragraph: 'These three tales have nothing in common, apart from the fact that all three protagonists are converts to Islam.'*

The reader wonders: Nothing else in common? What about a pathological obsession with violence? Do the author and ISIM wish to strengthen and further spread the idea that Islam and violence are the same? Or does it go without saying?

FRITS STAAL

Frits Staal, University of California at Berkeley
<http://philosophy.berkeley.edu/staal/>

■ *If Frits Staal had read my entire article instead of relying on his bad suspicion, he might have understood that a careful distinction between Islam and violence is indeed made in my work, none of which is intended in the sense as indicated by Staal. In the article, I was simply affirming that these three tales of converts – to quote from the article – '...deeply affected the American imagery and brought about a re-awakening, or even the discovery of an interest in the Islam of converts, which until recently with few exceptions was mainly considered to be a phenomenon limited to the black Muslims movement of Elijah Muhammad and nowadays of Louis Farrakhan (of whom John Allen had been a follower), and consequently almost thought of as an "ethnic" oddity'. Of course, Staal is free to find what he likes to find, however astounding his findings may be.*

STEFANO ALLIEVI

NEW FELLOWS

The ISIM welcomes the following new fellows:

Ph.D. Fellows

– Chuzafah, M.A.:

'Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers in the Gulf: Transnational Relations, the Dynamics of Religion, and the Construction of Identities'

– Miriam Gazza, M.A.:

'Rai' Music in Holland:
A Question of Identity, Islam, and Gender'

Post-doctoral Fellows

– Dr Marloes Janson:

'Appropriating Islam: Finoos (Islamic Bards) as Brokers between Global Islam and Local Culture in The Gambia (West Africa)'

– Dr Frank Peter:

'Religious Authorities in French Islam:
A Case Study of "Imams" in the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF)'

Visiting Fellow

– Dr Saba Mahmood

University of Chicago